

Congressman Nadler to Address 9/11 Health Concerns on House Floor

Wednesday, 09 May 2007

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congressman Jerrold Nadler (NY-08), whose New York City district includes Ground Zero, will join with other members today to discuss the many health concerns resulting from 9/11 recovery efforts. Rep. Nadler, who has pushed hard for expanded health benefits and coverage and a greater federal role in helping the victims of 9/11-related health problems, will address the issue in a "special order" floor speech expected to be delivered later today. His remarks prepared for delivery are as follows:

"When the World Trade Center collapsed on September 11, 2001, the towers sent up a plume of poisonous dust that blanketed Lower Manhattan. A toxic mixture of lead, dioxin, asbestos, mercury, benzene, and other hazardous contaminants swirled around the site of the disaster as rescue workers labored furiously in the wreckage, many without adequate protective gear. Thousands of first responders inhaled this poisonous dust before it settled onto and into countless homes, shops, and office buildings.

"Immediately after the collapse, EPA had the responsibility of being the agency responsible for ensuring the safety of the hundreds of thousands of people who live, work, and attend school in Lower Manhattan. Instead, it began two separate cover-ups: first it assured all that the environmental condition in New York City was not hazardous, and second that the health of those near the plume was not in danger.

"In fact, the air was not safe, and countless people are still living in homes and working in offices that contain World Trade Center dust. The comprehensive testing and clean-up program that is so desperately needed was never done. Former EPA Administrator Christine Todd Whitman, who irresponsibly declared in the days following 9/11 that the air was safe to breathe and the water was safe to drink, continues to plead innocence.

"There is no doubt that thousands of people are sick as a result of contamination at the World Trade Center. A study released last year by Mt. Sinai Hospital found that 70% of the more than 9,000 first responders studied suffer health problems related to their work at Ground Zero. Yesterday, the New York Times reported a clear link between World Trade Center dust and life-threatening diseases. The article cites a report by doctors from the Fire Department of New York and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, which again confirms what we have known for years: we are facing a major health crisis as a result of September 11.

"And these studies do not even address the students at Stuyvesant High School, whose school sat near piles of debris from the towers, the nearby residents whose apartments still contain poisonous dust, or the thousands of people who work in offices that were never properly cleaned. These factors combined present an unprecedented challenge to public health, not just in New York City, but across the country.

"In the days and weeks after 9/11, New York City firefighters and police officers joined with workers and volunteers from all fifty states to aid in the colossal rescue and recovery effort. But more than five years later, the Federal government has still not done its part. To this day, there has been no comprehensive testing and clean-up of the affected areas. For every day that goes by, more and more people become sick and are diagnosed with illnesses that their doctors attribute to the contamination from the World Trade Center.

"That is why I have introduced the 9/11 Heroes Health Improvement Act of 2007, which would provide more than \$1.9 billion in federal funding for medical and mental health screening, testing, monitoring, and treatment grants to institutions that provide care to those whose health was affected in the 9/11 attacks. Congressmen Towns, Engel, and Weiner introduced this legislation with me, and Senators Clinton, Schumer, Kennedy, and Menendez have introduced companion legislation in the Senate.

"For more than five years, the Federal government has failed the hundreds of thousands of people affected by 9/11. The fifth anniversary of 9/11 saw tremendous public outcry, but little government action. Congress can and must act now. Five years later, it is time to clean up this mess and provide help to all those who are still awaiting the medical screening and care they need.

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